



# The California Master Plan for Education

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## “Local Control” of Schools – The Roles of the State and Local Communities in Education

Frequently asked Questions and Answers

**Q. What real authority and responsibility will local school districts have under the Master Plan?**

A. The Master Plan assigns substantial responsibility to local districts to determine how to most effectively use resources provided by the state to ensure that all students meet or exceed state standards for achievement. It also clarifies the responsibilities of state-level and regional/county entities and assigns appropriate authority to each entity so that each can meet its responsibilities in providing public education. .

The combined impact of the 1976 *Serrano v. Priest* court decision (which states that the same property tax rates should yield virtually the same amount of funding per student among districts, without regard to the individual property wealth of each district) and Proposition 13 shifted a substantial portion of the responsibility for public school finance from local districts to the State. With that shift came a growing state influence over education policy and increased awareness of the differences in educational opportunities and outcomes throughout the state. The Master Plan reaffirms recent state efforts to clearly state the expectations California has for what all public schools will teach to students.

**Q. What about the “home rule” option contained in the Master Plan; won’t that open the doors to inequality of the sort prohibited by the *Serrano v. Priest* decision above?**

A. No. The “home rule” concept would permit a unified district, with the approval of its local electorate, to develop local ordinances on how it conducts its business within a limited sphere of influence. The limits of this local sphere of influence would be specified in the state constitution. Home rule would also authorize those districts to take steps to generate local revenue in order to offer unique services and programs desired by their service communities. First, however, the State must have fully funded all public schools consistent with its adopted California Quality Education Model (CQEM). Equally important, an equalization mechanism will need to be adopted to achieve compliance with the *Serrano v. Priest* decision.

**Q. Just what is the California Quality Education Model?**

A. Consistent with the Master Plan recommendation, the Legislature passed last year, and the Governor signed, legislation to create a Quality Education Commission to determine the components of quality that should be in every public school and to attach a cost to each component. The total cost of all of these elements represents what California needs to invest to ensure that all students throughout the state receive a quality education. The opportunity for local districts to generate local revenue above that required under the CQEM cannot be exercised until after this commission presents its recommendations and the model is adopted by the Legislature as the new method for funding public schools.

**Q. Doesn’t the Master Plan just give lip service to the notion of “local control”?**

**A.** No. The Master Plan does not view the traditional notion of local control as the key issue. Instead, it outlines a plan for a single, coherent system of public education in which the responsibilities of state entities, regional/county education agencies, and local school districts are defined to be complementary to each other. Each of these entities would be held accountable for the decisions it makes in carrying out its responsibilities. The more important issue is that for students to be well served, each of these entities must understand and carry out its respective set of responsibilities consistently over time.